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ABSTRACT

If Australia's adult educators involved in adult literacy, language, and numeracy provision are to initiate significant changes in the inequalities existing in Australian society, they must examine a range of issues extending far beyond classroom walls. Much discussion about workplace communication in recent years has evolved from the growing emphasis on new workplace cultures advocating egalitarian, collaborative work practices and industry environments that acknowledge cultural diversity and the interrelatedness of workers' needs and industrial efficiency. A 1993 study funded by Australia's Department of Employment, Education, and Training examined the issues facing literacy, language, and numeracy in the coming century and resulted in the development of a framework of guidance for curricula. The new framework, titled "Positively Different," suggested a curriculum that works toward the goals of justice within and beyond the classroom walls and focused on the role of institutions in developing and implementing curricula for social justice, the differences between "good" educational practice and political practice that is explicit about relations of power shaping that work, the concept of the "relearning classroom," and professional development activities needed to enable teachers to address social justice issues effectively. (Contains 26 references.) (MN)

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Is an inclusive classroom enough?: literacy and social justice.

Paper presented to the Pre Conference Institute,
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IS AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM ENOUGH: LITERACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Introduction

It is hard to write any paper on adult literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) these days without referring to work and the political and economic changes driving workplace reform in the 1990s. Although that is where I want to start, somewhere else, it will become apparent throughout this paper that talk of LLN and work has become almost a 'natural' preoccupation in adult education. I begin by describing some outcomes of a DEET funded study (Shore et al, 1993)[1], (hereafter referred to as *Positively different*) which developed a framework of guidance for LLN curricula. *Positively different* had to take account of the historical growth of the LLN field and the long held view that literacy and language in particular are integral to social justice. The aim was to present a framework for thinking about educational practices and institutional infrastructure required to sustain a curriculum that addresses the needs of those people so often marginalised by conventional education and training. In addition it had to draw on the significant changes buffeting the LLN field (Gilding, 1992) and drawing it to the heart of training debates. And so it became impossible to avoid the ubiquitous influence of industry, work and economic imperatives that are currently driving provision.

This paper reviews the broad context of LLN provision as we approach the new millennium and describes the outcomes of *Positively different*. I expand on two aspects of the guidance offered to practitioners and managers and end with some comments about alternative views of social justice and opportunities for organisational change. Throughout the paper I emphasise that inclusivity and social justice are matters that rely on practices embedded in institutional settings. As educators we must examine a range of issues far beyond the classroom walls if we aim to initiate significant changes to the inequalities in Australian society, via the vehicle of LLN provision.

LLN provision: workforce priorities and current practices

Much discussion about workplace communication in recent years has evolved from the shift in emphasis to new workplace cultures which advocate flatter structures, egalitarian, collaborative work practices and industry environments which acknowledge cultural diversity and the inter-relatedness of workers' needs and industrial efficiency. Literacy and language development in particular have been drawn centre stage as important components of workplace re-organisation. As a recent Australian National Training Authority paper (ANTA, 1993a) illustrates, broad notions of literacy are prominent in the list of objectives designed to meet the four priorities critical to the success of the new National Vocational Education and Training System (NVETS). These priorities for 1994 are

- to build a client-focused culture
- to create and promote opportunities for lifelong learning
- to advance a national identity for the system
- to reward innovation and best practice approaches (ANTA, 1993a, 7)

This same paper proposes that the characteristics of the workforce of the year 2000 will be much the same as at present and this new environment will need workers who are

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1 This paper is based on ideas originating from the work of the project, *Positively different*. I am indebted to my colleagues - Adeline Black, Melanie Coombe and Anne Simpson for the work we undertook together during the project and to the many educators and learners who challenged our thinking on curriculum and social difference, and pushed us to relate our work to the idiosyncratic nature of this field.

> multi-skilled and flexible [and] will need to operate in a participative and team based approach with greater delegation of authority to lower levels in the enterprise. Emphasis will be placed on increasing efficiency and productivity and employers will be looking for examples of best practice/benchmarking to set standards for their organisations. There will be an increased emphasis on quality issues. The bottom line is likely to be doing more with less and doing it in better, more efficient and cost effective ways.
>
> The new workplace will be customer-focused and responsive to rapidly changing market requirements (ANTA, 1993a, 3).

A discourse of collaboration is implicit in the ANTA priorities and changes advocated for the workplaces of the future, but in the context of literacy and language practices such claims for change often assume predictable reactions to workplace texts (Luke, 1992a) and disregard the gendered relations of workplace sites (Butler and Connole, 1992) and conflicting relations in other social settings[2].

While there are targeted changes in store for workplace cultures, I am less optimistic about shifting many of the racist, sexist, and other discriminatory patterns in current education and industrial systems, and wider community settings where much LLN practice is still situated. Policy developments and future frameworks of LLN competence, and curricula emerging from these frameworks, will need to use this foundation of inequality as a starting point for educational and industrial transformation. It was in this context of visions and everyday practices that *Positively different* was written. It had to take account of the industrial changes mentioned, however it also viewed LLN use as diverse social practices, commonly used for other purposes besides 'work'. Language, (both written and spoken) is central to processes of industrial change but to move beyond workplace cultures language, in broader terms, is the means by which we name and define ourselves; it is how others name, define and position themselves in relation to us. Language, can be used for both empowering and constraining purposes.

Positively different supported the notion of multiple literacies, used in many settings including 'the workplace', but at the same time acknowledged that those literacies may contain competing discourses, and that some of the differences embedded in those discourses may work to silence or marginalise 'other' literacies. Many recent definitions and perspectives of literacy 'render invisible the gendered construction of LLN learning and make no allowance for the use of LLN as a tool for domination and oppression' (Shore et al, 1993, 20). (See for example workshops by Nakata and Walton, Kammler, and Mungabhai at the recent Literacy and Power: difference, silence and textual practices conference, at Griffith University in June 1993.)

In this particular project the focus was on curricula ***about*** literacy, language and numeracy. Therefore two themes of social justice prevailed. First, because language is a means of negotiating defining, and producing knowledge and ways of operating, in addition to resisting and revisioning alternatives then, 'inclusive' LLN curricula are central to any processes of social or workplace transformation and as such will need to recognise the value laden nature of language practices, and be explicit about how these practices reflect the values and expectations of a 'mythical norm' (Lorde, 1992, 48) . Second, LLN competence is one means of access to many of the retraining opportunities currently being marketed in the workplace and is therefore one avenue for social justice initiatives. But the whole idea of workplace, indeed,

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2 The media coverage drawing attention to political and public dissent over the Mabo ruling and the recent comments by members of the Australian judiciary which propose that Australian women are in part responsible for acts of violence committed against them are but two examples.

social transformation is seen as problematic by many educators, academics, trainers and managers alike. Much of the rhetoric of workplace justice evolves from distributive notions of social justice (Young, 1990) which equate power with material resources. This fundamental mis-blending of human qualities and material resources is at the heart of many practices which, while seeking to improve opportunities for workers and people generally, has the potential to assimilate them into industrial and social systems which are hostile to the very diversity they claim to value. It is this tension in the second theme of social justice that continued to anchor our ideas about the kind of guidance most effective for programs aiming to shift the asymmetric nature of social interaction.

Developing curriculum for social justice

Positively different sought to engage with the social justice claims driving provision in some institutions and the types of practices necessary to sustain these claims. Two key principles emerging from this project influence my discussion here. First, arguing for LLN provision as education for social justice (Reid, 1992) makes the whole business of provision so much more complex. It positions providers (and thus managers and educators) as part of a complex web of relations - often ambiguous and contradictory in their claims for the outcomes they seek for participants in programs. It also highlights a shift in the advocacy arguments of the 1970s and 1980s, which were largely of individual empowerment and self actualization through literacy, to 1990s claims for social justice and economic productivity through a more 'efficient, effective, equitable' (Gilding, 1992, 6) post compulsory education which will drive educational and industrial reform into the new millennium. My concern is that this shift in rhetoric will further coopt equity and social justice concerns embedded in much of the empowering rhetoric of literacy provision and by default push aside debates about literacy as a social, rather than a specific workplace practice. In so doing it ignores the needs of those people not seeking entry to the workforce.

A second principle viewed curriculum work as more than the private practices occurring within individual classrooms.

> [C]urriculum [work] must account for aspects of the educational process beyond the educator-learner interface. Curriculum is all the learning experiences students have within a course *and the experiences and decisions that impact on their learning in the course* (Shore et al, 1993, 23).

Neither of the above principles simply discussion about provision and responses to these directions often echo similar concerns - *'it's all too big', it doesn't have to be so complex', 'we have to give teachers something practical and achievable*[3]. Throughout the project we knew such broad approaches to curriculum work and education *for* social justice ran the risk of paralysing teachers and managers working for social change. Their individual efforts appear to pale in comparison to national efforts to incorporate literacy within manufacturing paradigms (Gilding, 1992) and solve the problem of unemployment. However we believed it was important to set curriculum practices within a theoretical framework which acknowledged the conflicting nature of work in this field. Consultations with practitioners indicated many would welcome further theorising of a field which was limited in discourses available to resist the arguments of economic rationalism embedded in many government policies of the 1990s.

Two themes emerged from our reading of the literature to shape the direction of the project; the

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3 We were in fact surprised at the often contradictory responses from some teachers who welcomed theory to support their practice and from academics who suggested that teachers and managers would appreciate practical advice.

nature of social justice as a relational concept and the need to conceive of social difference as something more than 'other groups' positioned (usually in deficit terms) against the status quo. With respect to the former it was evident that many programs, intentionally or otherwise, conceive of justice as a material commodity to be dispensed via resources. Such provision highlights issues of access, delivery modes and outcomes, usually assuming that equal proportions of each will change the asymmetric distribution of opportunities available to women, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and so on. This ignores the issue of how people operate with each other and through each other in social settings where deeply embedded racist and sexist practices may prevent use of their newly developed competencies (See Rigg and Kazemak, 1984).

The second point has been raised in adult literacy literature by feminists such as Horsman (1989), and Brodkey (1986, 47) who draw attention to the tendency to categorise the 'il/literate':

> all definitions of literacy project both a **literate self** and an **illiterate other**, the tropics of literacy stipulate the political as well as the cultural terms on which the "literate" wish to live with the "illiterate" (original emphasis).

This tendency to position as 'other' is exacerbated with respect to social difference and presents such difference as 'human deviance' (Lorde, 1992, 48) when compared to a 'mythical norm'. As Lorde notes however this norm is just a myth and we would be hard pressed to find people who slot neatly into this category.

Curriculum development for social change must then take account of issues such as the relational qualities of power and the tendency to link inequality with lack of resources, lack of individual ability, lack of opportunity and so on, rather than any behaviour, deliberate or otherwise, initiated by privileged groups in society. From this perspective 'giving' to 'others' does very little to change the balance of power or the nature of social relations between people, and 'improving others' to a level where they are assimilated unproblematically into the status quo ignores the value of social difference and the hegemony of the dominant social grouping.

This approach to curriculum development exposes three elements of curriculum work which have become naturalised within the process to such an extent that they are often rendered invisible in curriculum documentation. Curriculum work is not always explicit about the fact that

> all groups have 'culture' or 'ethnicity'; what is significant about white Anglo-Saxon, masculine culture is its 'taken-for-granted' position as the dominant valued culture; this obscures its ethnicity. Curriculum development involves selecting knowledge and methods which as Connell notes, is not random or neutral with respect to the structure of the society in which it occurs (1988, 66); ... curricula practices will be influenced by decision-making structures and procedures embedded within the institution in addition to work and cultural characteristics specific to the institution. (Shore et al, 1993, 15-16)

Positively different suggested a curriculum which works towards the goals of justice *within and beyond* the classroom walls does a number of things:

> it actively engages learners in learning that is relevant to past experiences and future needs
>
> it reflects the similarities and differences found within and between social groups
>
> it acknowledges the historical and political nature of these points of similarity and difference
>
> it recognises that the curriculum is a potential site for initiating changes that enhance

> learners' social and vocational prospects while increasing their awareness of factors constraining their capabilities. (Shore et al, 1993, 5)

However, if curriculum initiatives for social justice are to have an impact beyond the classroom walls they must be mindful of the ways in which institutional practices yield to the status quo. In this respect LLN curriculum work must begin to target managerial practices, curriculum development processes, aspects of policy formulation, the notion of prepackaged curricula and the potential for new developments such as curriculum frameworks to present a view of teaching and learning that is steeped in the values and beliefs of privileged groups[4]. I don't believe this will be easy as for many of us we are so much a part of that status quo that we are often unaware of how our thinking is forged by the very conditions that we might seek to overcome. It requires a degree of willingness and courage (Shore et al 1993) to challenge what appears to be a fair and natural process and this is usually done through language - the very foundation of this field.

By looking beyond the classroom *Positively different* foregrounded institutional practices such as decision making processes and policy development and their implications for Australian practice, in the context of a rapidly expanding field. The time seemed ripe to offer alternative perspectives on social justice and inclusivity given the newly emerging literacy bureaucracy which seems destined to set agendas for provision into the new millennium. However, developing inclusive curriculum founded on positive conceptions of difference is also likely to have problems associated with its development and implementation. How are 'different' cultures identified? In what ways do the selections themselves sustain certain forms of privilege or obscure intentional biases? Feminist and anti-racist literature has been significant in challenging educational work for social change. One concern embedded in much of this writing (Jeffreys, 1991, Lorde, 1992) is the potential for difference to accentuate the exotic. Difference, often in the form of bizarre examples, is 'added on' to the basic mix (read 'capitalists and professionals, male, Anglo' (Connell, 1988, 68)) as examples of other ways of being or doing. In essence this results in a view of culture which highlights food, dance, and seemingly exotic rituals of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and 'ethnic' groups while ignoring the taken for granted 'ethnicity' of white, Anglo-Saxon, masculine culture. Furthermore difference often accentuates cosmetic differences; skin colour, sex, obvious physical ability, at the expense of differences among supposedly homogeneous groups such as 'women' or 'people with a disability'. In fact there are no such monolithic categories, just as there is no group of 'unemployed' that can be conjured up to represent the diversity of needs and interests of youth, older people, men, women Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders, some of whom may share the experience of being unemployed.

And disputes about difference are themselves problematic. Black, feminist and lesbian women in particular have cited the dangers inherent in using difference as a powerful tool to undermine or divide groups pitted against a seemingly universalist culture. Monolithic group representations may be inaccurate, however they draw upon common themes of racism, sexism and/or homophobia for example, and indicate how people might experience unemployment in ways that both overlap and differ. As Lorde (1981, 97) notes

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4 There is also the danger of misrepresenting what a curriculum framework actually is and this has been pointed out many times by Coates in consultations on the National framework for generic literacy, language and numeracy competencies. The framework is not a curriculum document and furthermore contrary to beliefs expressed by some teachers during consultations for *Positively different* the framework will still require of teachers that they make judgements about which competencies to select and how to best engage with those competencies. In terms of cogent arguments to resist the deskilling of teachers in initial schooling this seem to be one of the major advantages of a framework for adult educators.

> the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries true, but that does not mean it is identical within these boundaries.

So a 'curriculum of difference' is not without problems, and it would be naive to think that differences can always be resolved harmoniously.

An inclusive curriculum, which sees difference as a potentially positive set of relations, must attend to the grounded realities of how people work through their differences as they engage with each other. Processes for negotiating these often contradictory outcomes is essential. Consensual or democratic processes are not always appropriate in recognising competing claims. In a democracy, where majority rules, there are always 'losers'. A consensual process on the other hand may leave no room to address common visions and different ways of achieving them, or the possibility of different visions which may coexist, albeit with some disharmony. It is these negotiating processes both within and beyond the classroom walls that offer avenues for realising an education for social justice through LLN provision.

Institutions and curriculum for social justice

The challenge facing providers is very much about how to work with, and through, our differences and it seems to me that this is best done by modelling, across the institution, the very processes we advocate in classrooms that are 'positively different'.
Positively different aimed to foreground the role of managers, curriculum writers and policy makers, and the central place of decision making processes, division of work and cultural practices within curriculum development. We proposed that

> [i]t is not the sole responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the inclusive curriculum is in place or that it works. Institutions and systems are clearly responsible for the overarching framework within which teachers' inclusive practices operate. (Shore et al, 1993, 66)

Therefore in asking what might change as a result of this project we sought to ask *How would institutions look in this new environment?* rather than *What would teachers do to realise claims for social justice?* and situated literacy and language competence at the heart of this new institutional environment.
A curriculum of difference will have similar themes whether acted out in classrooms or decision making forums of the institution. It involves

> examining critically the process of constructing social groups
>
> acknowledging the processes by which conventional educational knowledge is constructed and loaded to maintain and enhance a position in social interaction generally dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon, middle class, able-bodied males
>
> identifying where, how, and why conventional knowledge has systematically excluded the achievements, contributions and experiences of various groups
>
> developing policies that do not 'presume as the norm, capacities, values, and cognitive and behavioural styles typical of dominant groups thus disadvantaging others' (Young 1990, 173).

This kind of curriculum process is not just about asking critical (read negative) questions, offering exotic exemplars of 'other' cultures, or using the occasional group activity to accommodate what Kazemak (1988, 24) calls women's tendency to 'define themselves in terms of connection, circles and chains of caring, and by how they respond to others'. And it is also

not 'some bourgeois add-on' (Luke, 1992a, 15), which disappears when functional things like job applications, safety forms, notes for school or letters to friends are the focus of learning. It is about on the one hand 'initiating students into powerful discourses' (Bradshaw, 1993, 3) and on the other being explicit about the means by which those discourses suppress ways of talking about difference. A curriculum of difference is directed across classrooms and decision making forums. Its practices address the issue of education's role in shifting social inequality, and at the same time acknowledge the limitations of this role. These practices

> explicitly examine and exploit differences between [group] members
>
> do not accept behaviour or language that oppresses or stereotypes group members
>
> do not offer false promises about the potential magnitude of individual and social change
>
> recognise that different power relations exist between members of the group as individual personalities and as members of commonly identified social groups (prisoners, Aborigines, or people with disabilities, for example)
>
> examine individual power relations between [people] in the context of wider social relations
>
> give each person a position from which to speak while not privileging individual views above those of others. (Shore et al, 1993, 63)

In eliding the distinctions between learners, educators and managers the above set of practices magnifies the importance of the relational at all levels within the curriculum process. Responsibility is directed towards all participants to do something about how we operate together and while teachers are not let off the hook with respect to the aims and purposes of a socially just curriculum, they are positioned more realistically within a systemic framework of educational provision.

Many institutions have already recognised the importance of a learning culture which values the contributions of workers across the institution. As Senge (1990, 8) notes 'the old model, "the top thinks and the local acts," must now give way to integrating thinking and acting at all levels' in the organisation. In learning institutions of the future people will be encouraged to clarify their goals, to take risks with differences in communication, to share background experiences and to be willing to take risks in revealing their beliefs and social circumstances. This will also include acknowledging their individual assumptions and biases with regard to other individuals and social groups and challenging and analysing their own and others conceptions of 'difference' and where that stands in comparison to prevailing social norms. (Shore et al, 1993, 64) These are important strategies for acting on and through differences, but they are also strategies that are alien to some people and at times actively discouraged in systemic processes. While much literature has been developed on how teachers might respond to these directions in classrooms, there has been little explicit attention to these issues in the newly developing LLN bureaucracy. Institutions that are sincere in their attempts to have honest representation of and subsequent action on the range of needs of employees and learners must do a number of things to initiate the possibilities of curricula of difference beyond the classroom walls. In the next section of this paper I will talk about the range of sites available to push forward the project of a curriculum for social justice and expand on some implications in two particular areas.

Sites of action

The guidance offered by *Positively different* has three distinct characteristics. It raises issues

relevant to institutional and classroom practices. It makes a distinction between good educational practice and political practice which is explicit about relations of power shaping that work. We believed that some 'good practice' in literacy work obscures the systematic ways in which society enhances privilege and selectively draws on knowledge from a narrow social grouping - one that many LLN practitioners, managers and academics slot into with relative comfort. (This has been elaborated with respect to feminist literacies in Black and Shore (1993)). Finally, it identifies six aspects of curriculum development which bear further scrutiny in order to address competing and contradictory needs arising from diversity; creating the curriculum, how the players interact, selecting knowledge from 'the' culture, assessment, resources and professional development.

On reflection I believe the two most significant areas of guidance offered by the project describe *'How the players interact'* and *'Professional development'* and it is to these that I wish to turn for further discussion of the implications of the guidance offered in the project. These sections of the report emphasise the importance of relational qualities in an education for social justice aimed at moving beyond mechanical notions of LLN competence, and by default, 'giving' economic, social and personal empowerment (For discussion of some of the flaws in these promises see Kazemak (1991), Horsman (1989) and Shore (1993)). For me these sections emphasise the personal and political aspects of educational work for social change and serve as a reminder that while each forum may require us to resolve issues (for example structure of courses, staffing decisions, course numbers or resource choices) there are personal/relational aspects to the forum that cannot be ignored[5]. These aspects influence how and when we speak, who we speak to and for, and when we might choose to remain silent.

There have been many calls for a 'critical' curriculum (read also 'inclusive' curriculum or 'curriculum of difference') to redress the imbalance of conservative content, assessment practices, resources and curriculum documents which leave the status quo significantly unchallenged[6]. Decision making forums in organisations (i.e. meetings) and professional development opportunities are sites for inserting more powerful critiques of existing work and I think these critiques will be most beneficial if they are underpinned by themes of 'difference as positive' and 'justice as relational'.

For the rest of this paper I want to look at how these issues surface in the bureaucracy and the range of responses available to workers across community, industry and TAFE systems who have a commitment to social justice and an interest in avoiding simplistic distributional solutions to complex relational problems.

The 'relearning classroom'

In previous work (Shore, 1993) I have been particularly taken with the idea of the 'relearning classroom' (Shor in Shor and Freire, 1987, 101). Basically Shor suggests that empowering practice requires that teachers - and in this context I would add managers and curriculum writers - come to educational settings prepared to relearn with the group. Their experience, expertise and particular knowledge of institutional settings and policy initiatives is valued however it is not privileged through the meeting structures or language practices of institutional settings which tend to drift towards white, Anglo practices. A 'relearning' environment means we

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5 I am indebted to Melanie Coombe for reiterating this point throughout our discussions in the project.

6 I realise there are historical and ideological differences between these terms. In *Positively different* we chose to stay with the term inclusive, recognising its limitation, but also acknowledging for example feminist critiques of the developments in critical curricula.

all, including 'the privileged', have a responsibility to genuinely explore how we have come to know what we know, and who benefits from these forms of valued knowledge[7]. It also recognises the political and value laden nature of literacy work and the many interests, at times incompatible, which must be juggled.

Whether in classrooms or decision making forums there are a number of tensions inherent in this 'relearning' environment. A key question here is what is the role of the educator in facilitating classroom environments? This is pertinent when considering how foreign it might seem to have a class where the teacher is indistinguishable from the group for much of the learning process. There are a number of tensions associated with these ideas. First, not all learners (or teachers) share the same desire of or tolerance for learner centred and self-directed learning (SDL) approaches supported by many programs based on 'adult learning principles'. As one educator noted during consultations it was especially difficult for an older Polish woman to accept this new form of collaborative learning when she viewed it as inferior to the 'proper schooling' she had missed in her village at home during the war. She saw this as just another occasion where her needs were disregarded by an inflexible education system. I would also add that SDL classrooms may set up ambiguous relations between teachers and learners and ignore teacher expertise at the expense of an egalitarian veneer in the classroom. Furthermore what is the role of teachers in exploiting cultural difference in the classroom while at the same time challenging racist comments or interaction within learning groups. As Das Gupta (1993) notes many educators (and academics I dare say) are unclear about what to do when students make racist or sexist comments and then gloss over them with humorous asides. (I shall return to this point in a moment.)

Managerial practices have their own analogies. The literature on groups is overflowing with examples of similar shifts in leadership styles and the varying expectations of leaders who must be visible but collaborative; able to delegate and lead from behind. Senge (1990, 9)[8] suggests

> leadership in a learning organisation starts with the principle of creative tension. Creative tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, "our vision", and telling the truth about where we are, our "current reality". The gap between the two generates a natural tension.
>
> Creative tension can be resolved in two basic ways: by raising current reality toward the vision, or by lowering the vision toward current reality.

I will return to the problem of "telling the truth" in a moment.

It seems to me that these managerial and teaching orientations require adept interpersonal skills. A problem inherent in such work, however is the individualist orientation of interpersonal skills work that often values individual empowerment but tends to disregard the highly gendered, raced and classed nature of social relations in families, workplaces and communities generally. I support calls (Luke, 1992b) to increase people's political understanding of the systematic and structural influences on such things as unemployment and poverty. I would also call for a more sophisticated understanding of the political dimension of interpersonal relations. One example of this is demonstrated in the belief that humour is an essential ingredient of a

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7 Gilding, 1992 notes that the adult literacy field is now one where careers are being made and we shouldn't ignore the possibility that literacy practitioners, managers and indeed academics seek the same vocational security as many literacy learners, and thus our work is driven by this imperative as well.

8 My thanks to Dr Ted Sandercock for supplying this reference.

'good' class, however, jokes and a fun atmosphere can also mask insecurities which perpetuate unequal relations of power or distract groups from the task of dealing with issues of discord and disharmony. How do you deal with racism and sexism within the class, and in what ways are these practices replicated in the forms of literacy we teach?

Clearly though, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination occur beyond the classroom. I think we can extend Shor's concept of the 'relearning classroom' to the 'relearning organisation'. This goes beyond learning organisation literature, which may coopt the transformative discourse of some educational projects. A relearning orientation requires that the aims and purposes of the learning organisation be situated within a political and personal framework that critically examines how decision making initiatives structure and coopt the language and practices of social justice and at the same time volunteer windows of opportunity[9]. Learning organisation literature is aware of this. Senge (1990, 9) refers to Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts to "'dramatize the shameful conditions' of racism and prejudice so they could no longer be ignored". It is this principle which characterises the relearning organisation and learning organisations that are sincere about a relational project of justice within LLN provision.

In the 1990s the 'relearning' organisation is particularly relevant to the new literacy bureaucracy. If new policies and practices are to move beyond the 'deficiency' remedial focus of much literacy work of the past (see especially ANTA (1993b, 2) for concerns about vocational training) and situate LLN at the heart of relational competence then such a vision will involve examining not only what 'others' can do to improve their opportunities but also what 'we' can do to dismantle inequitable practices. This requires that we examine the ways in which people relate to each other and the instances of oppression which Young (1990) suggests may be perpetrated by good intentions as much as by deliberate attempts to oppress or dominate people. A curriculum of difference acknowledges and values differences but it also recognises the ways in which personal interaction and structural arrangements in institutions blend social differences to produce new 'mechanisms', and 'modes of delivery' which are presented as neutral structures. In terms of claims for social justice these maybe no different from existing structures which often invite participants to enter into contracts with institutions with an aim to assimilating them into the status quo.

Professional development

If a 'relearning' environment permeates the whole institution then professional development practices are a cornerstone of successful practice. The implications are significant for a field which has had few sustained opportunities to consider issues such as the pre-service needs of educators, the invisibility of women in policy and structural arrangements (not one recommendation addressing women as a visible category in the National Collaborative Strategy (DEET, 1993) currently being distributed), forms of training and development ***with and for*** teachers rather than ***on and at*** them and few opportunities for managers to extend their understanding of educational concerns as well as interrogate managerial perspectives they are developing on the hop and often times at the 'margins of their competence' (Gilding, 1992, 89).

In the current climate some of this professional development needs to examine the wording of

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9 I am also mindful of the dangers of promoting views of lifelong learning within these organisations and the potential to replicate the hostility and asymmetric outcomes experienced by many individuals and groups in initial schooling. In the relearning organisation these matters would be addressed through the very negotiating processes I have discussed in this paper.

policy documents which on the one hand have placed literacy on the agenda and on the other presented as neutral highly contentious 'structures' and 'mechanisms' that will be responsible for framing that agenda. Other professional development may need to address consultative practices which are presented as one of the key means by which field issues identify and inform policy development. In fact consultation is a word repeated frequently in the *National collaborative adult English language and literacy strategy* (DEET, 1993) but Bin Sallik (1992) argues that Aborigines (for example)

> are getting weary of being asked to give our opinions and participating in decision making processes only to find that our opinions and participations have been what Freire regards as "false generosity" (Freire, 1970, p.29)

She proposes that the exercise is all too often an attempt to

> seek my time and ask my opinions and then find excuses as to why my suggestions won't work, or that the bureaucracy makes it so difficult to implement change. ... Therefore I feel that I have been used to either help these people : a) to become more neurotic teachers; or b) to feel more comfortable with their neurosis.

Bin Sallik draws attention to the potential for consultation to side step crucial opinions and information that may disrupt the naturalness of structures that obscure genuine needs.

Positively different argued that

> the claims for social justice made by the dominant culture have stopped short of examining the most fundamental obstacle to social justice: the defining and positioning of certain groups at the margins of society. This positioning will inform the decision making structures and the culture reflected at all levels of the system and within the curriculum. (Shore et al, 1993, 35)

To move beyond marginalisation through difference it is necessary to establish consultative processes guided by 'active self determination', 'negotiation' and 'articulation of different needs and values' (Shore et al 1993, 37). This process is by no means easy. For example Wickert (1991) notes the unexpected difficulties associated with arguing for particular kinds of literacy provision now that it has become a more recognisable part of the education arena. Some of these problems are surmountable if systems, and more importantly those who work within them, are able to loosen their grip on achieving outcomes which have been pre ordained, must be created from a very narrow band of possibilities and sustain a system which is in many ways silent about the inequalities it perpetuates. Overcoming problems requires that systems do a number of things with respect to decision making. They must

> provide information on how decisions are made within the context of the institution, its structure and its mission
>
> adopt strategies within the decision making process to review manager and educator assumptions that underlie procedures and decisions
>
> examine how procedures might silence particular voices during the decision making process
>
> make procedures and structures accessible to people participating in debate
>
> be explicit about how structures exist

within the bureaucratic structure, identify people and positions that are actually accountable for the degree to which decision making procedures are successful in addressing community needs

Professional development to operate within and against the hegemony of the dominant cultural grouping is, like the practice of classrooms of difference, something which does not come easily. Being on the edge of opinion in a staff meeting is not all that different from being on the margins in a LLN classroom and may in fact be more problematic given the feminised contractual nature of employment conditions within the growing bureaucracy. In addition the professional development I am talking about must consider how individual attitudes are influential in maintaining the momentum of existing forms of provision. While there are many levels within the system where 'structures', 'mechanisms' and 'policy' set the agenda, these processes are enacted through people. We have the opportunity to maintain a silence where justice seems to be subverted, or to speak. However in speaking there will be no guarantee that the message is heard or understood.

I this context professional development seems to be about three things. First, learning how to imagine alternatives; options that appear quite 'unnatural' at first glance. Second, changing supposedly neutral decision making procedures embedded within existing meeting procedures. Third implementing a personal politics of change which is grounded in the discomfort we feel when any one of us speaks from what feels like the margins.

Conclusions

Commonwealth aims and purposes of LLN provision are situated within quite complex economic and political settings. These aims and purposes are often incompatible with a wider project of social justice which proposes that LLN skills development and redistribution of resources misses the point of the relational quality of power and empowering practice. In this paper I have proposed that an inclusive classroom is not enough if LLN curricula aim to develop an education for social justice. The wider context of the institution must be considered in establishing what happens in classes to create opportunities for learners to express cultural experiences and determine how they will engage in social action (Young, 1990).

I believe much of the work of LLN providers is guided by sincere attempts to change many social inequalities, but this work is limited in its effect by the restrictions inherent in the decision making processes of 'masculinist bureaucracies' (Young, 1990, 176). The literature on learning organisations provides a window in to the possibilities for change however within this literature there is a need to persistently question the values underpinning the learning, or relearning, orientation adopted by the organisation. The decision making processes within organisations are sites where this can occur and these structures need to problematise what is decided, how, and by whom, in addition to the gaps and silences within the processes. This will not be easy. It will take time and in the current climate more 'bloody meetings' are likely to be resisted by all because of the sheer frustrations experienced in 'doing more with less and doing it in better, more efficient and cost effective ways (ANTA, 1993a). I am suggesting that 'cost effectiveness' in a relational world may have to be redefined because there is ample evidence at the moment that many existing LLN strategies and forms of provision are reproducing social inequalities and sustaining the gap between the 'advantaged' and the 'disadvantaged'.

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